

Introduction

CAUTION: HOT BUTTON ISSUE – wearing a flimsy paper mask going into the office at work during covid; whether it offered protection or not wasn't the issue; rather, I wanted to act honorably around my unsaved co-workers and I was willing to bear the cost to maintain peace

1. This morning we're going to talk about being at peace with the world around us, but let me start by EXPLICITLY stating some disclaimers:
 - a. Jesus said the world will hate us because it first hated (and still hates) Him
 - b. As such, as Christians peace with the world will ALWAYS be allusive and it should never be our ultimate goal
 - c. Appeasing the world or becoming like it in an effort to have peace is NEVER an option (nor does it work)
2. With all this said, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't seek some form of temporal peace while in this life:
 - a. We learned in our study of 1 Timothy, we are to pray our government leaders and all in authority so that we may lead a tranquil and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity
 - b. The Bible says that as long as it depends on us we are to be at peace with all men and that we are to pursue peace with all men
3. In our passage, we will see what this looked like in Abraham's life:
 - a. Abraham encouraged peace by agreeing to live honorably with Abimelech and the inhabitants of the land (Genesis 21:22-24)
 - b. Abraham sought to maintain peace with Abimelech by bearing the burden of peace (Genesis 21:25-31)
 - c. Abraham took advantage of the peace to live and serve God in the land (Genesis 21:32-34)

A. Abraham encouraged peace by agreeing to live honorably with Abimelech and the inhabitants of the land (Genesis 21:22-24)

1. In the beginning chapter 20, Abraham journeyed to the far southern end of Canaan to the city of Gerar; this area would become the southernmost part of Israel
2. It was there that he first met King Abimelech and it wasn't under the best of circumstances:
 - a. Abraham deceived King Abimelech by claiming that Sarah was only his sister, so the king took Sarah into his harem
 - b. The Lord confronted Abimelech, but ultimately forgave him—in part because he sinned in ignorance, but also because he repented by returning Sarah to Abraham
 - c. He even went above and beyond God's command by making restitution (both to Abraham and to Sarah)
 - d. However, in the process, he rebuked Abraham and Sarah for their dishonesty
 - e. This actually sets the table for what we see today
3. In order for there to be lasting peace between Abimelech and Abraham, Abimelech sought Abraham's promise to live honorably with him and the inhabitants of the land (READ 21:22-24):

- a. As Abimelech and his commander approached Abraham, there are two things he knew about Abraham:
 - 1) The first thing Abimelech knew that God was with Abraham (1): **“God is with you in all that you do”**
 - a) It was clear to Abimelech that Abraham was in a relationship with God and enjoying His blessings
 - b) This might have been partly because of Abraham’s wealth and prosperity
 - c) However, it seems fair to assume that he might have developed a profound understanding of Abraham’s connection to God after his own encounter with God back in chapter 20 (when God confronted him in a dream over taking Sarah)
 - 2) The second thing Abimelech knew about Abraham isn’t so flattering:
 - a) He knew Abraham hadn’t dealt truthfully with him before and this is apparently what prompted this visit
 - b) At this time, Abraham was living in southern Canaan in the land governed by the king (Philistia), and the king wanted to ensure that Abraham would deal truthfully with him and the inhabitants
 - c) Might this have been prompted by a fear that if Abraham deceived others just as he had him that God would judge the land?
- b. Abimelech’s request involved Abraham’s promise to be both truthful and loyal: **“so now, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the lovingkindness that I have shown you, you shall show me and the land in which you have sojourned”**:
 - 1) Abraham had already deceived him once before, so the king was asking him to promise not to do it again to him, his children, or his descendants
 - 2) What he expected of Abraham was the same kind of loyalty (“lovingkindness”) that he had shown to Abraham (READ 20:14-16)
4. Abraham agreed and swore to deal truthfully with Abimelech (24): **“I swear it.”**
5. Takeaway: If we desire to live in peace with this world, we have to be committed to living honorably:
 - a. Now, you may say living in peace in this world shouldn’t be our goal or desire, but listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:1-8:
 - 1) He wrote that we are to pray for all men so that we can live a peaceful life, but ties it to living honorably (READ 2:1-2)
 - 2) He wrote that this is good and acceptable to God: (READ 2:3)
 - 3) But, notice also that he ties living quite and tranquil lives in godliness and dignity to the purpose of the Gospel (READ 2:4-8)
 - b. Think about this: back in chapter 12, Abraham was called to be a blessing to all nations:
 - 1) Now, we know this was a foreshadowing of the Gospel and how the Savior would come through his descendants
 - 2) However, Abraham and Israel were called to be Yahweh’s witnesses to the pagan nations of their day as well
 - 3) Here we have Abraham living in a pagan land surrounded by pagans where he is expected to be a blessing, bringing the truth about Yahweh to those around him
 - 4) It’s a little hard to do this, however, when his first impression is that of a deceiver

- 5) Do you remember what God said about Abraham before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? (READ 18:16-19)
- c. God expects the same thing of us, to be a blessing to the world by bringing them the good news of the Gospel; but this made all the more challenging if we don't live honorably among them:
 - 1) We know the world will hate us so there's no guarantee that we will be able to live in peace in this world; but it certainly doesn't help when we behave dishonorably or in an un-Christlike way in the world
 - 2) In fact, we are commanded to live honorably precisely because it can help overcome the world's hate and may lead some to Christ (READ 1 Peter 2:12-15)

B. Abraham sought to maintain peace with Abimelech by bearing the burden of peace (Genesis 21:25-31)

1. We learn a little bit more about what may have initiated King Abimelech's visit to Abraham (READ 21:25-26):
 - a. Some of Abimelech's servants had seized one of Abraham's wells; the word Abraham used refers to stealing, robbing, or taking by force
 - b. While Abimelech claimed to have not heard about the incident with the well, it likely led to conflict between Abraham's and Abimelech's servants, and he may have sensed that
 - c. Regardless, Abraham had a valid complaint having been robbed of a vital source of water
2. Abraham obviously accepted Abimelech's claim of ignorance because the two of them agree to enter into a peace covenant (READ 21:27-31):
 - a. One of the things that stands out about this peace covenant is that Abraham bears the burden or the cost of the treaty
 - b. This is somewhat remarkable and unexpected because Abimelech is the one who initiated the peace covenant so normally he would be expected to provide the animals; however, Abraham steps up and bears the cost
 - c. In addition, Abraham gives the king seven ewe lambs, apparently to ensure legal rights to his own well!
 - d. Finally, Abraham names the place Beersheba to commemorate the covenant:
 - 1) The second part of this word, sheba, comes from either the word for seven or the word for oath (they are similar) and it's not clear which
 - 2) So, Beersheba means either "well of seven" (a reference to the seven ewe lambs Abraham gave Abimelech to secure his rights to the well) or "well of the oath" (a reference to the oath sworn by Abraham and Abimelech)
3. Takeaway: Often, in order to be at peace with this world we need to be the ones who bear the burden and cost of peace:
 - a. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 6:27-30
 - b. Paul repeated Jesus' command and followed it up with what we read in Romans 12:17-21 (READ)
 - c. Did you hear that? **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men"**
 - d. This means we often have to bear the burden of peace when it comes to not just other believers, but especially the world

C. Abraham took advantage of the peace to live and serve God in the land (Genesis 21:32-34)

1. We see a number of important things in these final verses:
 - a. The first thing we see is that Abraham planted a tree at Beersheba:
 - 1) The text doesn't tell us why Abraham planted the tree so we are left to speculate
 - 2) However, the fact that he planted a tamarisk tree may give us a clue:
 - a) We have tamarisk trees here in the southern US, but they are significantly smaller than what you find in the middle east; here they are more like bushes or small trees, where in the middle east they can grow to 50 or 60 feet high
 - b) They are an evergreen with dense green foliage, used primarily for shade, and reproduce aggressively (a single large tree produces a half million seeds per year and the resprout after fire and even severe flooding)
 - c) Now, here's the thing: they grow extremely slow (about an inch per year) and it would take as much as 400 years to grow to full maturity--So, Abraham obviously wasn't planting the tree for his own benefit (he wasn't going to get any shade out of it unless he crawled under it on his belly)
 - d) And, by the time the tree reached maturity, there would likely be an entire grove of tamarisk trees!
 - e) This is why in the ANE when someone planted tamarisk trees on their property, they weren't planting them for themselves, but for their descendants
 - f) I believe that Abraham planted this tree, next to this well, knowing that it would reproduce and serve his descendants for generation after generation, those God promised would possess all the land of Canaan
 - g) In fact, this tree and others it produced would actually be reaching maturity about the time that God promised Abraham his descendants would come back into the land after spending 400 years in Egypt (READ Genesis 15:13-14)
 - b. The second thing we see is that Abraham worshipped God:
 - 1) The text says **"and there he called on the name of the LORD"** which we know from the rest of the Bible refers to worshipping God
 - 2) When the Hebrew word for call is coupled with a name it is often used in the sense of calling out to or summoning someone; that's a neat description of worship, isn't it?
 - 3) Abraham also uses an interesting name for God here, El-Olam or **"Everlasting God"**:
 - a) It's easy to overlook the significance to this name and simply think that Abraham is referring to God's eternal nature
 - b) That may be part of it, but there may be more to it than that
 - c) Throughout His interactions with Abraham God used the word "olam" to refer to His relationship to Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting one (READ Genesis 17:7-8, 19)
 - d) As Abraham plants the tamarisk tree for use by generation after generation of his descendants who would possess the land, and he begins to worship God, he is reminded of God's everlasting covenant and promises and refers to Him as the Everlasting God
 - c. The last thing we see is that Abraham settled in the land:
 - 1) The text says, **"and Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days"**

- 2) This is another way of saying that Abraham stayed a long time in the southern part of Canaan; Genesis 22:19 says that he returned and lived in Beersheba after returning from Mt. Moriah after God tested him by calling him to sacrifice Isaac
 - 3) It's not clear though if he stayed there for the rest of his life because the Bible doesn't say; it only tells us where Sarah lived and died (according to Genesis 24:62-67, Sarah lived with Isaac in Beer-lahai-roi which was south of Beersheba about 30 miles, but she died in Hebron which is about 15 miles north of Beersheba;
2. What stands out to me in these verses is that Abraham took advantage of the peace between him and Abimelech (and the inhabitants of the land) by focusing on what God called him to do:
 - a. He planted a tree in preparation for God's promise to return his descendants to the land
 - b. He worshipped the Everlasting God in the land among the Canaanites
 - c. And, he continued to sojourn in the land just as God called him to
 3. Takeaway: like Abraham, we should take advantage of the peace God gives us in this world by focusing on living righteously and completing the mission God has given us:
 - a. Listen to what Paul instructed Timothy to do (READ 1 Timothy 2:1-8):
 - 1) He wrote that prayers and petitions be lifted up for all those in authority (e.g. governing rulers) **"so that we may lead a tranquil and quite (peaceful) life..."**
 - 2) He wrote that this is **"good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior"**—so praying for and living in peace is a good thing
 - 3) However, did you notice that there are two things tied to our living in tranquility and peace?
 - a) First, we do so **"in all godliness and dignity"**—one of the patterns we see in the OT, and something we are warned about in the NT, is that often when peace and prosperity comes, sin follows closely behind them!
 - b) Second, Paul tied God allowing us to live in peace in this world to God's desire to see all men saved (v. 4-5)—what this tells me is that we should be using the peace and prosperity God gives to us as His Church to further the Gospel, not simply to secure a happy and fulfilling life for ourselves down here